

# OF PRIESTS AND PEDERASTY

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Every priest, religious and Catholic lay person I admire is furious with the extent of the pederasty problem in the clergy and the way it's been handled. Indeed, if someone claims to be a good Catholic and isn't outraged, I'd begin to wonder. It always hurts more when those whom we trust let us down.

Having said this, I hasten to add that it is not the job of the Catholic League to involve itself in the internal affairs of the Church. Our role is to fight wrongdoing against individual Catholics and the institutional Church. It is not our job to fight wrongdoing by the Church.

The chief reason for this is simple. We have no authority to either speak for the Church or to act as its mediator. We are a lay Catholic organization that knows its place: we defend against defamation and discrimination. It is not our place to assert ourselves into the body politic of the institutional Church anymore than it is the job of the ADL to inject itself into the affairs of organized Judaism. Our mandate is that of a civil rights organization, no more and no less.

There is much blame to go around. Too many clergymen and counselors, psychologists and psychiatrists, failed us. But behavior doesn't occur in a vacuum and that is why social factors must be considered.

When I was at The Heritage Foundation in the late 1980s, I wrote a book called *The New Freedom: Individualism and Collectivism in the Social Lives of Americans*. It was an attempt to understand how a new idea of freedom took root in the U.S. and how it influenced behavior. The new freedom, reflective of the social upheavals of the 1960s, held that liberty could be measured by the absence of constraints. Philosophically, the idea was not new, but in terms of the

American experience, it certainly was. To say this conception of freedom has become a societal nightmare would be an understatement.

The Catholic Church's teachings on freedom remain profoundly hostile to this irresponsible interpretation of liberty. The Church teaches that liberty means the right of individuals to do what they ought to do. The dominant culture, following the dictates of the new freedom, teaches that liberty means the right of individuals to do what they want to do. Hence, the culture war.

While the Church did not change its teachings, the new freedom nonetheless made its way into the seminaries and beyond. A more relaxed, non-judgmental, attitude took hold. An Oprah-like emphasis on "feelings" took priority over reason. Sexual experimentation was considered harmless, even worthwhile. Punishing wrongdoing was medieval; it was better to treat the individual than to punish him. From the remedial education of students to the rehabilitation of prisoners, every malady could be fixed. Even pederasty.

It would have been surprising had the Church not succumbed, at least to some extent. After all, even traditional institutions like the Church and the military are affected by the prevailing cultural winds. So when radical individualism and moral relativism took hold outside the Church, it was only a matter of time before some of these cultural currents made their way inside. The net result has been a decline in community, civility, and the most elementary standards of courtesy and common decency. To call this freedom is to make despotism attractive.

No society can tolerate full-blown ideas of sexual emancipation without paying a high price. Just consider the radical agenda of the children's rights movement and the extremist demands of sexual engineers.

In the 1970s, John Holt was a well-respected educator who taught at Harvard. Richard Farson was an influential psychologist and author. Both argued that children should be given equal rights to adults—in every instance—including the right to live alone, decide whether to attend school, vote and have sex.

Extremists in the gay community promoted suicide. They demanded that the bathhouses remain open even when it was clear that they were the proximate institutional cause of AIDS. Moreover, they demanded that they have free reign to experiment with the most dangerous objects and sex practices. And some wanted the boys. Many heterosexuals, it needs to be said, also proved to be reckless.

There is a direct line between these radical ideas of freedom and priest pederasty. Once the lid was taken off, and once those in authority lost their will, all hell broke loose. As we have sadly learned, the liberation of the id is lethal. We want it all—no social constraints and no social consequences. The whole idea of the new freedom is built on a lie.

The greatest damage of all has been to the tens of thousands of good American priests who labor everyday to do God's work. But they will prevail. The Church has taken a lot of hard knocks in history and some of the wounds have been self-inflicted. Yet it always rebounds and often comes backs stronger than ever.